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ABSTRACT

The predicament of journalism as both an objective observer and a subjective participant is examined in this paper. Among the topics discussed are some basic ethical entanglements involved in the dilemma; regional newspapers that have been legendary for personal-involvement journalism; current evidence that journalistic performance is being sacrificed in the coverage of civic projects in which management has a participant self-interest; the trend toward reporter activism that arose in the 1960s, and cases that illustrate how the new muckraking can accommodate public service ideals; speculation by press critics regarding the dilemma and possible solutions to it; the notion of the press as an adversary of the government; and questions about the goal of news and information in society. The paper also delineates two ideal types of journalistic roles--neutral and participant--and poses some ethical and intellectual questions for further study. It concludes by examining the notions of "social responsibility" and "the public interest" as applied to the press, discussing possible solutions to the dilemma, and noting the growing awareness of the dilemma on the part of working journalist. (GT)

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Newspaper Division

NEWSPAPERS AS CIVIC PARTICIPANTS AND OBSERVERS: DILEMMAS IN JOURNALISTIC OBJECTIVITY/SUBJECTIVITY

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A major, unresolved and troublesome dilemma in journalistic ethics centers around the predicament of journalism as both an objective observer and a subjective participant. The problem is complicated by the notion that communications and community are perhaps inseparable,[1] and that the press is a political, economic and social institution and historically, "the most important unifying element in urban culture."[2]

Some perspective on this ethical quandary suggests that one might explore the past practices of publishers and newsmen in this frustrated plight; examine evidence of ethical codes and guides for professional conduct; and then perhaps conclude some resolution of this paradoxical complexity. An urban context appears useful for this inquiry.

The first ethical entanglement is presented by the idea that the newspaper is a civic actor and business and political institution.[3] Another is the proposition that "In default of a territorial political party or other institution that accepts responsibility for the formulation of a general civic agenda, the newspaper is the one game that by virtue of its public and its conventions partly fills that vacuum."[4]

The difficulty presented by the attached press being a detached observer is augmented by its ties and support to established authority;[5]

its being considered part of the governmental process and adjunct to city hall;[6] and its being seen as an actual fourth branch of government.[7] It is not uncommon for the press itself now to assign its role in the power structure;[8] to suggest "government by newspaper";[9] and to even hold in awe such esteem and possible influence.[10] These assumptions breed ethical enigmas.

A second entanglement in the ethical ambiguity of participant and observer is the marriage of newsroom policy to the "civic good" of progress, prosperity and the growth ethic of the chamber of commerce.[11] This civic ideology of civic superlatives that "bigger is better" promotes and protects the city's reputation as a "place to do business". The publicity of the positive civic image can even substitute for achieving goals. As an end in itself, boosterism often defines the public interest, which in turn can define ethical press behavior.[12]

Bad local news often creates "conflicting claims of journalistic duty and hometown loyalty".[13] "Everyday, somewhere in this land of boost and uplift, a reporter or an editor hears a plea that reporting facts, however dispassionate, will injure the community."[14] This provincial tradition[15] of civic defense of "our fair city" from outsiders and competitive civic economies[16] may also bring "afghanistanism". Then, negative stories are found outside the trade and circulation area while local problems are ignored.[17] A leading, recent work on news media ethics suggests that:

> ". . .institutional ethics-bending has perhaps been more frequently in situations involving media economics than anywhere else . . . media proprietors sometimes alter the picture of reality a little (or a lot) before putting it before the eyes of the public. . .a spirit of sectionalism or support for the home-town--what newspaper publisher Warren Harding, in his pre-presidential days, summed up as a policy of 'Boost, don't knock. . . .The booster's motivation may not be to keep local advertisers or officials happy; it may instead be a reflection of a spirit of defensiveness or protectiveness with respect to the region or the community."[18]

The third entanglement is the aforementioned civic patriotism often masked as an unquestioned public interest without ethical scrutiny. This area of conflict between journalistic performance and the economic role of the press is perhaps the most knotty ethical problem. Newspaper histories are rich with unabashed self praise for "community service" projects involving private activity for the "public good". Flattering and uncritical biographies of cities and newspapers often melt press participation and observation into one glowing essay on the public interest. Journalism history is often indistinguishable from urban history.

"It is impossible . . to separate the history of a single newspaper from the history of the times during which the newspaper was published" as in St. Louis, the Globe-Democrat was a "survivor of Civil War mobbings; friend and champion of Abraham Lincoln . . .backer and friend of Lindbergh; promoter of transportation by water, land and air, crusader for smoke elimination . . ."[19] In Detroit, the News and the city "grew together".[20] Newspapers are often "synonymous with the cities where they are published" and "To think of Milwaukee without the Journal is like trying to think of New York without Broadway, San Francisco without the Golden Gate, Washington without the capitol---clearly impossible!"[21]

City history and growth have been baptized in newspaper activism and bathed in editorial hyperbole. The Indianapolis News hired a reporter to start a chamber of commerce in the late 1800s.[22] A half-century later, the editor-in-chief of the Christian Science Monitor, Erwin Canham, was president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The growth and expansion ethic was hawked nearly a century ago by the New York Tribune's Horace Greeley ("Go West") and Henry Grady's Atlanta Consitution ("The New South")[23] and today, the same booster pattern continues.

In earlier Chicago days, the Medills and McCormicks practiced "personal journalism" though promotion of civic projects and political participation. Medill's friend Lincoln would "climb the stairs and sit in the editorial workshop of Mr. Medill, his feet on the edge of the editor's desk" in the Tribune building.[24] (Medill was also a mayor before William Hale (Big Bill) Thompson, in the 1920s, urged all civic boosters to "Throw away your hammer and get a horn.") Such was the optimistic attitude of the Tribune in the early 1950s, when it rejected knockers of the city's economic decline and assigned a reporter, George Tagge, to lobby in the state legislature for a new convention hall the publisher urged, and which was later named for him (McCormick Place) and nicknamed for the reporter (Tagge's Temple).[25] The Tribune editor defended the publisher-editor-reporter activism on the project:

> "'Because it's good for the city. But partly from selfish motives too. We want to build a bigger Chicago and a bigger Tribune. We want more circulation and more advertising. We want to keep growing, and we want the city to keep growing so that we can keep growing.'" [26]

Other powerful regional newspapers and their families are legendary for personal involvement journalism: Nelson for the Kansas City Star; Chandler for the Los Angeles Times and Jones for the Houston Chronicle. Each left behind urban growth and civic monuments: streets, parks, aqueducts, canals, plus Chandler Pavilion, Jones Hall and the Nelson Art Gallery. Nelson's civic credo and editorial canon was "The Kansas City Star has a greater purpose in life than merely printing news. It believes in doing things."[27]

And the pattern continues in both large and small communities but the question is asked of how activist publishers should be.[28] The goals of the government and the chamber of commerce are often inseparable

from the newspaper agenda. Chain operations[29] and smaller towns and cities like Toledo,[30] Hartford,[31] Spokane,[32] Portland,[33] Abilene and Ft.Worth,Texas,[34] have had a tradition for press booster-activism, whether for civic festivals, new highways, or renewed downtowns to boost trade areas. By custom,[35] the newspaper is the handmaiden of commerce and the related prosperity of population, circulation and advertising.[36]

There is current evidence that journalistic performance is being sacrificed in the coverage of civic projects in which the publishers and other management have a participant self interest. Because of newspaper economic ties, Jacksonville, Fla., newspapers "repeatedly suppressed news outright;they repeatedly kept arguments advanced by critics of the (nuclear power) project out of the headlines and buried them . ." and behaved "like publishing arms of the chamber of commerce."[37]

In Denver, where the Post and the city government are building a city arts complex, the newspaper's role, the decision-making process and public criticism are not being covered fully. The "editors may be compromising the paper's ability to report the news from city hall" as the newspaper "has made its financial health and owners' success dependent on the course of municipal politics."[38]

In Seguin,Texas, a small town publisher, allied with local government leaders in the building of a county coliseum, failed to generate full debate on the civic project as "no information was published critical of those with official responsibility" and "conflict was smothered under a cloak of silence, while community unity behind the project was the official line of the newspaper."[39]

"No newspaper publisher will deny that he is in business to make money, but he will(emphasis in original) deny that his profit motive affects editorial policy to the detriment of the public interest."[40]

And editors echo the gospel of good works preached in the longtime bible of "community service" journalism whereby "public improvements" are noble obligations for the journalist and "will give the editor a place in history aside from the yellow files of a newspaper kept in the musty corner of an old library."[41]

Monuments and public office tend to be more visible and maybe more remembered than editorials. Editor William Allen White, who had always opposed the idea of an editor seeking elective office, himself ran for Kansas governor in 1924 in order to speak out against the Ku Klux Klan,[42] Early critics of the conflicts of interest of the "controlled press" challenged the "subordination of journalistic public service to sordid money-making".[43] More recent questions are raised as to whether the profit-making corporation can convey news the public needs,[44] and whether the corporate earning power of chains is more important than content and journalistic quality.[45]

Publishers still relish the myth that the corporation does not affect news and the idea of separated news (observation) and editorials (opinion and participation) is essential to corporate credibility. Nevertheless, "Some of the rationale for journalistic procedures thus rests firmly on economics".[46] Some have gone further in numerous studies to find that "the publisher does set news policy" and that newsmen's notions of news and the public interest are defined by conditions, norms and social controls in the newsrooms;[47] and outside it where the publisher has community power status.[48]

Such management influence on news policy has been subtle and some might say hypocritical. When Dallas Morning News publisher G.B. Dealey "emerged as a dynamic city leader, a man who could organize and get things done, a man who wielded the power at the News", the management

issued rules for editors and newsmen that "Personal journalism of every description must be avoided."[49] However, publisher-activist Dealey's influence "was all done by suggestion. To suggest was power enough for Dealey", whose personal negotiations helped get the city a railroad station, a federal reserve bank and a university campus.[50]

Publishers can argue their activity is for economic public interest. Thus, the Jacksonville plant might relocate elsewhere; Denver is able to retain its press tradition as patron of the arts; and Seguin's needed community facility resulted from press consensus and eadership. In critical periods of civic adversity, economic malfunction and government lull, newspaper executives and other business leaders take the initiative to identify community problems and map new objectives for reform and redevelopment.[51]

One editor suggests that in such cases, a newspaper owner, publisher or editor can ethically create a decision-making group with personal influence in private channels as "a legitimate function of newspaper management. . . .without prejudice to the newspaper's independence in its newsgathering function or to the stating of its frank opinions on its editorial page."[52] A national study shows a majority of editorial writers are involved in civic, religious and veterans' groups and on government boards and agencies,although they see a need to limit such activism in order to retain impartiality. "Perhaps the paradox is explained by differences in perception about what is political involvement. It is more likely, however, that this finding reflects an unresolved conflict between a professional journalistic norm and perceived responsibility in citizenship."[53]

One ethical stance on journalistic involvement is that the good

journalist can be a good citizen active in government and civic activity,[54] and that "the largely artificial separation between citizenship and professional conduct has vanished in the American newsroom". It is argued that the journalist must be allowed to do more as a citizen, particularly on the community level. . ." as long as a personal decision is made between the two in "a clear conflict of interest".[55]

The motivation to act in a cause because of conscience is rooted in the American journalist as a "missionary".[56] In the 1960s, to boost or criticize city or country became an open public issue, as "the younger and more dedicated crusading reporters frankly and openly repudiate(d) the historic position that management alone has the right to determine what goes into the paper."[57]

It was perhaps fitting that a very significant and open clash of civic and national journalistic conscience came in Chicago in 1968 when young war protesters and reporters covering them were beaten by police eager to keep the Democratic convention in Chicago. (Ironically, it was held at the Stockyards because McCormick Place had burned the year before and was not yet rebuilt on the lakefront where demonstrators gathered.)

When Chicago's booster newspaper editors suppressed stories on police brutality and television was criticized for giving the city a bad reputation, young reporters started their own journalism review with its alternative picture of the public interest, the convention, civil rights and conflicts of interest by the press. The review enhanced the liberation of the budding media of new and alternative journalism.[58] The new activist reporters were seen as the "fourth revolution in journalism"[59] and as a possible new power structure.[60] Their subjective involvement in news events was defended as an obligation and ethical right which opened up new notions of the public interest.

Although definitions of the new journalism vary,[61] advocacy writing revealed urban and social issues beyond the hidden biases of so-called objective reporting. New literary techniques gave new insight into politics, and even mayoral activity by Mailer and Breslin. And the underground press harbored a place and community for other voices to challenge the established press and its society. The dominant public interest was challenged by journalists demanding a greater voice in editorial policy and greater public access for previously unheard and unheeded groups. The new public interest had an ethical rationale and helped create a new civic agenda by groups and journalists with a patriotism for city and country not greatly unlike the historic personal journalism of the old activist publishers.

However, in the wake of reporter activism, the focus of debate was on them and the ethics of their involvement in civil rights (race, war, prisons), and how personal citizen actions might conflict with professional responsibility to convey a general public interest in the press. One defense of the old publisher activism was they were expected to be involved, especially in small towns; but Washington Post columnist Nicholas Von Hoffman reminded the American Society of Newspaper Editors that a lot of political writers on newspapers were also go-between "bag men" and "fixers" for editors and publishers.[62]

Von Hoffman cited Tagge "as much a political operator for years as he was a reporter, but he was operating as the publishers wanted. So there was no question raised."[63] Von Hoffman, who believes in neutrality in action, but not in opinion by journalists, noted that reporters have always been involved but now more of them "in ways that stick in the management's craw."[64]

Tom Wicker of the New York Times, involved in both negotiations

and reporting of the Attica prison riots, contends that if a citizen-reporter supports the government, it is "safe partisanship" and not called activism. He reminded editors that a cynical public sensed "the music critic is fixed, the sportswriter is fixed, the real estate section is fixed, and so forth".[65]

Ethical codes on journalistic activism have been as loose and nebulous as definitions of the public interest. Wicker, "forever opposed" to a formal code of ethics, argues that ethical questions are ultimately "individual judgment". The ASNE and National Conference of Editorial Writers have rejected formal codes on ethical conduct.The typical platitudinous preachment is that the activist make clear "his separation as a civic catalyst from the professional newsgathering mechanism of his paper. He must also make clear the fact that his newspaper's editorial independence is not a subject for bargaining, even in behalf of worthwhile civic aims."[66]

That advice for editorial management trying to revitalize a city does not speak to reporters facing the more constant temptation to accept freebies, junkets, gifts from news sources; political acts of conscience; or stock holdings and moonlighting to supplement frequently low salaries granted by publishers. This "can of worms" was aired by Sigma Delta Chi in 1973,[67] and by the Associated Press Managing Editors, which passed the ball to the American Newspaper Publishers Association with the advice: "It's Your Move, Publishers."[68]

Involvement and activism by journalists is not only old, but has been argued to be ethically and journalistically sound if such activity gains both information and understanding for readers if reporters are engaged in civic or other affairs as citizens or reporters.[69] Thus, it

is argued:

> "Contrary to ancient journalistic shibboleths, it is good for reporters to become involved emotionally in their stories when remaining aloof and impersonal serves little purpose in a complex world which is difficult to comprehend. . . . Some of the best journalism, from the standpoint of constructive public service, has been performed by reporters who have deliberately courted newsworthy experiences. . . . Some of the activities are engaged in by reporters as private citizens; others, in the line of duty, can be called crusading efforts, and more than one Pulitzer or other prize has gone to an enterprising newsman and papers for this sort of activity." 70

So also with the new muckraking, which can accommodate the public service ideals and activism of (a) those who break away from the press and political establishment to challenge them with a new idea of the public interest; (b) those who stay within that system, adapt to policy and re-define or clarify the public interest of the society. Two cases illustrate this point.

When reporter Bruce Brugmann of the Redwood City, California, Tribune was forced by city and newspaper officials to leave the newspaper because of his crusades against real estate developers, he began his own independent Bay Guardian. The paper has "point of view" journalism "in the public interest", exposes the press and power structure, and "isn't part of the usually recognized team effort where the paper is working for city hall and the chamber of commerce, or on the other hand doesn't represent only a particular movement like the New Left. . ." [71]

In Washington, with an approaching presidential leadership void in the early 1970s, reporters Woodward and Bernstein at the Post faced the usual low pay, lack of status and little ego satisfaction typical in newsrooms. By adjusting to newsroom norms, they were able to "transcend the traditional observer role of the reporter to help shape history. They themselves became newsmakers. . . ." [72]

First, they adapted to the system. Bernstein had learned "how to drink and chase women". Woodward confessed "almost a perverse pleasure" in finding "something that is going wrong" in the community. And both realized that "The paper is built and lives and dies on Page One", and the rewards for reaching it were status and stardom. Bernstein had a strong drive, "born of his own insecurity", to produce Page One stories; and Woodward had "almost adulatory appreciation for all editorial direction."[73]

As Woodward explained, "'. . .you have to have a compulsive need to succeed. You have to be insecure and to want desperately to please your boss.'"[74] The prize was Page One and "this automatically means no tampering with policy".[75] And it also meant power, prestige and publicity for the publication and a chance to brag of its social responsibility.

Probably the most common solution offered for the dilemma of journalism as both participant and observer is a free and open-ended use and definition of activism as the public interest or social responsibility. Publishers and reporters can conveniently rationalize almost any activism since there is little restriction or challenge from enforced codes or explicit policy. Both are in some position to define and to solidify their definitions in print (and history), so their notions become somewhat closed to debate, especially if actions are wrapped in civic projects or national patriotism for the good of the public.

The project and protest provide both journalist and publisher with ego satisfaction. One gains a credible corporation; the other a credible career, with frequently fame in place of finances. The elusive quality of truth aids reporters in this intellectual escapism as does the implicit and vague newsroom policy for the publisher. The private news "corporation" basks in truth as "pr" and can create its own definition of the public interest by building or supporting public projects and by releasing "pentagon papers" while at the same time retaining the right to

sell truth to a mass audience with the right to know.

The old publishing magnate may be trading in his old machine for the newer management of the mass market establishment. The self-interest of the old business institution is re-defined as mass distribution of information on social problems of which there is ample supply. Crisis and conflict become profitable. The new symbiosis is the marriage of the enlightened press business to the liberal information and problem specialists who provide a rationale , define the new public interest and hope to "house-break" the publishers' craving for profits.

A mixture of press scholars, critics and apologists provide evidence for these speculations. In testimony to a classic activist publisher recognized for his civic renewal efforts, a sage of social responsibility by the press exalts the booster/activist for "public service as willing acceptance of the leadership burden of our industrial society" and as "a citizen responsive to the total community of mankind."[76]

The ethos of the public interest creed continues:

> "The problems of the day--full employment, eradication of slums, the alleviation of poverty, the improvement of schools, the elimination of racial discrimination, the provision of equal justice for all, the maintenance of peace and civil order --are the problems of business. . . .(which) . . .has furnished the leadership for social reconstruction . . .provides our principal resevoir of talent. Business men are working not only for a healthy, profitable economic system, but for a healthy society.
>
> If we have a liberal society today--one concerned primarily with the public welfare--it is because business and community leadership is prevailingly liberal--that is, forward looking,intelligent, cautiously optimistic, willingly competitive, and personally involved in seeking equal opportunity for all men.
>
> ". . .we (in journalism education). . .look for minds occupied more with the problems of the community than with the problems of the firm. No firm can do well in a failing society." 77

But what happens when the firm or family fails to see that what is good for the city and society is also good for the firm ? In that case, one study suggests that the reporter "should trust to his pro-

fessionalism to prevent being influenced by the management line. Thus, by knowing management's goals, the reporter's professionalism can play the role of countervailing force to assure that coverage is not distorted by corporate inertia or economic self-interest."[78] If that educational process succeeds, then the press can help the firm see the need for rational urban growth and development, a regional rather than just a downtown perspective, and that public consumption of news about public problems can increase newspaper prosperity. That is one reason, according to one press critic, that "The Los Angeles Times has turned handsome profits since it ended its career as a strident family trumpet and began being a good newspaper".[79]

The same critic defines "good" by saying "Leadership and policy control on newspapers need to be made more responsive to the society at large, not as a mirror image of the body politic, but sensitive to social and economic reality, as a good university it to learning." The question is not so much the bias of the firm, but whether it reflects "reality as rigorously as trained and independent professionals produce it" by accurately reporting "the most important issues". They include race relations, inadequate schools, poverty and urban decay, war, peace and the environment, whose cures depend on national wealth, taxes and "social policy".[80]

In a tone of resignation to the economic definition of public interest, the journalism pundit continues:

> "The ultimate question of corporate conflict of interest in the news is whether news and commentary as a whole would be different if news corporations had no outside financial interests. And if different, whether it could come closer than it does today to the needed improvement in reporting and relevant commentary. . . . .If the news and its interpretation are increasingly merely a byproduct of huge corporations whose primary concern must be conventional gain, then it is not a minor matter in public information or in the development of social and fiscal policies." 81

Journalism ethics is full of credos and canons of faith in an obscure and undefined public interest. In 1923,the National Association of Newspaper Editors declared "The right of a newspaper to attract and hold readers is restricted by nothing but consideration of the public welfare"and the "promotion of any private interest contrary to the general welfare, for whatever reason, is not compatible with journalism." The Hutchins Commission in 1947 urged the press to "Be responsible for the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of society". The APME in 1962 urged the "use of mature and considered judgment in the public interest at all times."

Journalism texts on both management and reporting often casually handle contradictions and righteous definitions of public interest, especially in so-called "community journalism", where management is close to both community and journalists. "What is best must be decided by the editor or publisher", is the advice of one text for management on community service projects, which it lists as valuable to the newspaper as a community institution.[82]

Those dealing with newspaper public relations are reminded that "If anyone needs a multiple personality, it is the small-town editor. His public expects him to be a speaker, fund-raiser, politician, salesman, scholar, diplomat, counselor, civic expert and business leader of the highest rank."[83] Numerous practices are cited, but advice wavers from "Avoid being too tied so closely to local affairs and movements that you lose the objectivity of local coverage" to "Jump in and support worthwhile projects even if they hinge on advertising".

Editors are supplied with maxims and other ethical proverbs on whatever is "right". The editorial dilemma on the public good lingers. A current text on community journalism teaches:"Our papers should become active partners with our communities in their struggles to grow

bigger, to improve more . . . .Yet we shouldn't become Chamber of Commerce organs either. If some project isn't right or if it's questionable, we shouldn't let it go just because the Chamber or the City Council endorses it."[84] A highly regarded text in the same field for many years describes an activist journalist: "A small town or suburban editor who works effectively for community projects must be a combination public speaker, psychologist, researcher, persuader, organizer, bulldog, politician, opportunist, and diplomat."[85]

As for guidance on involvement ethics, he says a project must be needed and "it must be ethically right, and a majority or many should benefit." Both awareness of front and flattery seem to be advised by the exhortation that "An editor may work months behind the scenes to get a state highway department to build a new bridge, but if its approval is announced at a meeting with several local citizens he should give them credit."[86]

The ethical guidelines are inconsistent and contradictory. As one study of the press as a participant-observer in a large city concluded: "Involvement, it seems, must be dictated by the circumstances that are in each individual case. And that involvement should go as deep as necessary to assure that the public interest is served."[87] Such elasticity makes "the public interest" highly relative.

Publishers may consider the problem academic if the public interest is defined by the mass circulation market and the new power groups. As one Detroit Free-Press executive put it, "'The only vested interest to which we shall respond . . . is that of our collective readers.'"[88] Los Angeles Times publisher Otis Chandler's concern includes credibility of his publication as older reporters identified with the mass market are being replaced by more educated,

specialized, upper and upper-middle class reporters "more sensitive than the average citizen to the important sociological problems that confront our society today." What are problems of public interest and "objective reporting to the reporter may appear biased to those readers who do not share this sensitivity."[89]

News of riots and other calamities (two Times reporters were beaten at Chicago) and even criticism of the Times by the mayor and governor are all negative grist for the mass audience mill. Nothing escapes the production, consumption and recycling of the "public interest" agenda. And there is no limit seemingly as "we should cover every subject that deserves the attention of a newspaper. . .regardless of whether it involves an advertiser. . . .friends of the owners. . . . (or) any special interest group."[90]

Such a broad social responsibility approaches a scope usually assigned to governments. Small wonder that the notion of the press as an adversary can also be sheltered under the same umbrella. The old publishers long cherished the idea of the government as a threat and adversary to business, which had to watch it for the public interest. To extend the idea to making the news operations a government or an adversary with constitutional rights helps fog the stigma of the press as a base and vile money-grubbing operation. As a leading advocate of the adversary theory puts it, "to dismiss the whole of journalism as a crass business poses a more perplexing question than it answers. . ."[91] A constitutional business can easier define public good

With expanded constitutional protection, the right of the press to gather and sell information "to make democracy work" sometimes is a story in itself, the Watergate case for example. Constant con-

flict between press and government provides a steady supply of news and perpetuates the myth of an adversary press.[92] This argument suggests that "government and media figures are increasingly interchangeable" as "One group gets headlines, the other bylines. Both enjoy the same daily 'fix'".[93] They "need each other to survive and prosper" and "the mechanics of confrontation tend to confirm the press in its pose as the custodian of conscience".[94] In reality, this notion continues, "the news media have now become part of the government in all but formal constitutional ratification of the fact."[95]

The adversary role bypasses some of the old riddles of objectivity-subjectivity and the unresolved dilemma of exactly what is the public interest to which social responsibility subscribes. The adversary press challenges the government rather than the economic system. It generates saleable criticism of the government and related ego satisfaction in the newsrooms and managers' offices. And more significantly, it moves the focus from any substantive probe of the nature of news policy on the public interest, to an emphasis on the independence, integrity, and skills of the journalist.

In dealing with pressures on the press, journalists are urged to do as "professional and as completely honest a job as humanly possible".[96] One journalism teacher in his "complete guide to techniques and ethics of news reporting" resolves the old objective-subjective dilemma by urging new words like "fairness" and "balance"; by greater use of primary sources and documentation, and answering the "why" and meaning of news.[97] This old idea still does not refine the public good.

A similar solution is that accuracy is a more fundamental issue than participant subjectivity vs observer objectivity, which is based

on the faulty assumption that observation can be a non-subjective experience. Accuracy would be tested by confirmation with others, its use in prediction, and whether the information can be used to make events happen.[98] Thus, any general public interest to which the press is socially responsible would be derived from the operation of a science of communication. Fair, rather than objective, reporters would then be "making public the directly observable data upon which inferences are made, making public the logic of inference used, and showing awareness of where others might disagree with the data on the inferences."[99] In simpler city desk terms, "Get the facts and tell all sides." Well said perhaps, but the dilemma remains: What is the public interest or the general welfare ?

The question has been broached by a mixture of professors, publishers and people in politics, who are concerned about the liberal consensus reflected in social responsibility themes in the press.

> "It is the viewpoint of the urban-bred, college-trained, confident of 'progress', urbane, mildly idealistic,slightly optimistic, blandly liberal. . . .more the attitude of the East and North than the West and South. . .more intellectual than practical. . .more a reformist middle-class or philanthropic upper-class viewpoint than a skeptical working class perception. . The consensus seems to assume that we can solve all our problems with: good intentions, education, university trained expertise, rational analysis, earnest conversation,peaceful efforts, and sophisticated compromise."[100]

This indictment charges the critical, subjective press and its content with overlooking complexities. It argues for public order and sees writers "deceived by the rhetoric of good intentions" and who "fail to question how their good objectives are to be achieved."[101]

A similar view admonishes that "The current emphasis on 'social responsibility' in journalism may well be nothing more than a subterfuge under which elite groups or persons go about trying to make

the press system over in their own image."[102] The admonition continues:

> "American journalism is becoming so institutionalized and professionalized and so immured with the nascent concept of 'social responsibility', that it is voluntarily giving up the sacred tenet of libertarianism--'editorial self-determinism'--and is in grave danger of becoming one vast, gray, bland, monotonous, conformist spokesman for some collectivity of society." 103

Some of this type of concern was inherent in the denunciation of the press by Vice-President Agnew in 1969. He chastised the networks, producers and commentators who "live and work in the geographical and intellectual confines of Washington D.C., or New York City". "Both communities," he said "bask in their own provincialism, their own parochialism" and present "a narrow and distorted picture of America" in their"endless pursuit of controversy".[104]

Agnew raised a question on news policy and public goals:

> "What is the end value--to enlighten or to profit ? What is the end result--to inform or to confuse ? How does the ongoing exploration for more action, more excitement, more drama serve our national search for internal peace and stability". 105

Liberals respond that there exists no conspiracy news policy by liberal Eastern media and that Agnew disliked press exposure of government and social problems. Even so, what <u>is</u> the goal of news and information in society, which presumably has a public interest to which the press pledges its allegiance ? As for a Northeast news policy, one study indicates that "The rise of the knowledge industry has created a new, liberal, and largely Democratic moral-self-righteousness elite based in the Northeast", with a "New York-Washington media axis".[106]

If regional and sectional cultures with their own communication systems are emerging(i.e. Sunbelt vs Snowbelt) will not the same issues of observation, participation and the public interest remain ?

With some liberties, for the sake of synthesis, two ideal types of neutral and participant journalist roles are described below with the use of studies by Segal[107] in 1973 and by Johnstone et al[108] in 1976. There are delicate margins and some overlap and conflict in roles; and some poetic license taken by the author from his preceding analysis.

----------NEUTRAL----------	----------PARTICIPANT----------
JOURNALISTIC ROLES	
Passive, Libertarian	Active, Social Responsibility
Objective, Observer, Recorder, Chronicler	Subjective, Booster, Participant, Activist, Problems, Solutions
Detachment, Description	Advocate, Adversary
Inform, Disengaged	Involved, Bias
Contemplation, Non-political By-stander, Witness, Technical Efficiency	Political, Action, Watchdog, Muckraker Citizen, Underground,
Sender, Communicator, Sources, Who, What, When, Where	Receivers, Consumers, Feedback Access, Alternatives Why, How, New Journalist
Control in Content, Place (building) Beats	Control in Journalist. Specialists, Experts, Codes
Accuracy, Facts, Historian, Novelist	Interpret, Explain, Evaluate Critic, Cheerleader, Commentator
Organizational Professional in News Hierarchy	Solo Professional in News Career
Extensive Formal Ties in Wider Society	Professional Colleagues for Social Ties in Large Cities
THE PUBLIC INTEREST	
Formal Social Solidarity	Focus on Social Problems, Functional Tension
Constructive Consensus	Social Change, Dissent, Control, Responsibility
Tradition, Solidity	New Consensus
Freedom, Libertarian Simplicity	Conformity, Collective Complexity

Some ethical and intellectual questions and predicaments linger for further study:

...Does a general public interest exist and is the notion useful? The press model could be compared with that in other fields such as political science and economics.

...Is the social problem(social responsibility) definition of the public interest a sign that news policy is moving outside the newsroom rather than remaining inside dictated by the internal needs of organization, business and professional pride ?

...If the press dropped any pretense of objectivity or policy on the public interest and merely admitted biases and involvement, would not its credibility be enhanced and restrictive, explicit codes and policy avoided ?

...Will the lack of any explicit policy on the public interest and mere professional information distribution create information overload ? Will that force newsrooms to accept responsibility for the consequences of information ? Or can perceptive news consumers(109) handle the feedback and thereby create a pluralistic public interest ?

...Can the ethic of growth and expansion be criticized fully if development is in the firm's own self interest ? Who will warn of consequences and is the critic a valuable patriot to city and country and how much "disloyalty" can be accommodated ?

...How are pet projects of publishers and other media managers treated in the news and how are reporters affected ? As large metropolitan dailies decline, how is the traditional role of the publisher changing ? As networks and electronic media expand, how are the self-interests of anchorpeople, weathermen, and sports-casters related to civic conflicts of interest ?

...Is not the role of communications in society dependent on the nature and goals of that society ? In American society, can the "toilet-training" of media management, the evolution of a science of communication, the usage of precision journalism, and even functional re-organization of newsrooms with expert professionals, ever change or function outside the national public interest of consumerism in a competitive society ?

...If journalism is ever rescued from primitivism(110), is not the next challenge to use communications to create a social order(libertarian, collectivist or some combination) in which change does not always mean crisis and destruction, and in which notions of excellence can find permanence and survival? Is the separation of the objective and subjective experience a help or a hindrance(or inevitable)toward such an ideal ?

Conclusions

To answer some of the questions and predicaments posed, the press practitioners have skirted or avoided the issue with an open-ended use of the term "social responsibility" serving another term "the public interest". The Hutchins Report studied 20 years later noted that "'Responsibility' is capable of a variety of definitions.The meaning varies according to who is talking, when and according to whom the press is supposed to be responsible to."[111] Even the Canadian experience of broadcasting and the public interest faced the problem that "Even if a suitable definition of the public interest could be agreed upon, differences of opinion remain about what needs to be done 'in the public interest' and how it may be accomplished,"[112]

In addition to whatever the public interest is and how to obtain it, the ethical quandary remains. A decade ago when a Philadelphia Inquirer reporter's public and personal interests clashed, even his competitors who exposed him admitted then that "It is ridiculous to think that there isn't a little bit of whoring going on in the journalistic profession".[113] At about the same time, a highly esteemed editor argued that "The editor should be equally the citizen, participating to the fullest in the life and aspirations of his town."[114] The "community's well being" and "opportunity for good" are supposed to outweigh improper influence in conflicting interests. The same editor brushed off the dilemma with the idea that ". . .if a newspaperman sincerely doubts that he can be any less impartial or factual when dealing, as a newspaperman, with affairs with which he is closely identified as a citizen, he shouldn't be in the profession in the first place."[115]

A decade later, the evasion of any definition of the public interest continues although the journalists continue to use the term. Columnists set aside the problem. Even press critic Charles Seib contends that "this business is so imprecise and far-ranging that any attempt to condify what is proper and improper is bound to fail".[116] Jimmy Breslin argues that "'No single group is the exclusive proprietor of the public interest. I say put it (even bad taste) in the paper and let the public decide what is good taste.'"[117]

A similar laissez-faire attitude is indicated by the congressional effort to drop FCC responsibility to operate in "the public interest"

and the hope that"'if a station was blatantly offensive to a substantial number of people, marketplace forces would take care of it!"[118] Meanwhile, the notion that ownership of the media, especially electronic, affects content and the public interest, an idea raised a decade ago[119] is echoed today.[120] and there is some indication that public interest programming is related to the economic success of the media.[121] However, editors may relish the notion that owners and managers with their money, power and prestige in the community are not a conspiracy of the Establishment to manage the news, which is merely "a crafted industry".[122]

Myths in the newsroom abound. The sanitized mechanics of production are supposed to separate the journalist from the reality which might affect his objectivity. Even the standard, sophisticated newsroom policy on conflicts of interest for journalists may restrict office-holding, publicity work and certain profit-making "in our circulation area", but that does not restrict "the rights of individuals to perform voluntary work for religious, service, cultural or social organizations".[123] The notion that journalists can function in an antiseptic bubble separated from the community clashes with the idea of an objective, collective public interest in a pluralistic, democratic society with constant battle among viewpoints in the marketplace of ideas.

When the society is seen to be generally threatened, journalists often blur their participation and observation in such crises where the general public interest is not debated but defended. Journalist and historian Barbara Tuchman suggests "I don't think there's any way of requiring or even hoping that a press will be objective or totally clear of the government in a national crisis like that. However, there's a great deal of life that's <u>not</u> a major war."(Emphasis in original).[124] But when multiple notions of the public interest abound and are cultivated, few areas are <u>not</u> a state of battle in the "war of ideas".

The consumption ethic probably comes the closest to a general public interest in America, but a lengthy recent discussion of the media's conflict of interests, the common criticism of media ties to the econmic system surfaced again, as "business and financial gain are at the heart of mass communications in America, and public affairs journalism and the public interest are somewhere else."[125] The solutions to the dilemma suggested were a de-concentration of media ownership, the opening up of

existing channels, the facilitation of new media, and the development of ethical and legal bases for professional journalism with a call for "journalists themselves to define the professional nature and requirements of public affairs reporting".[126]

Such a solution is related to the call for more media self-criticism, press councils, a humanized journalism and an educated public,[127] and the hopes of the communications and technological sciences for the exactness found in the medical profession. An interim resolution might be for the public interest to be defined more by functions of community rather than by chamber of commerce civic ideology and places and events for news.[128]

Also, the press might reveal more of its own conflicts of interest so that its public interest might be seen alongside its private interests. One argument is that the national media are now part of a New Class aristocracy called "mediacracy" reflecting the Eastern Establishment as previously mentioned,[129] "But, unfortunately, one finds an overall reluctance to discuss the emerging new set of vested interests as such", and the media themselves "deplore analysis and arguments that seek to strip away their philosophic mystique and present their bare self interest."[130]

As objects of press criticism, both business and government now ask that "the press itself should adjust to new social responsibilities" and that "There is nothing in the First Amendment that makes the media immune to the same kind of critical examination it administers to the rest of society".[131] Legislators call for the press to disclose its holdings and finances,[132] and the courts become skeptical of assuring the press rights which individuals do not have. And there are finally signs that media personnel themselves are willing to admit to the problems. A leading broadcast journalist acknowledges that "'this country is in danger of seeing the media becoming the political process itself.'"[133]

Others are asking whether the media should practice what is preached,[134] admit to its moral myopia[135] and confess to how private interests can affect news and notions of the public interest.[136] Large newspapers are beginning to cover the press itself and even how pet projects, even its own, might relate to news coverage.[137] The new idea caused one newspaper to expose the conflicts of interest of its own staff,[138] and create a widespread national interest among publishers not used to the idea.[139] The dilemma is finally being faced by working journalists:

> "We are only beginning to admit to ourselves that, yes, we choose the news . . .We are only beginning to deal with the fact that we sometimes are participants and not only observers, as we used to be. . . .some new consensus is indeed emerging about the new role of the new press, part observer in today's society but also part participant. It will monitor itself, reveal itself more, involve the public more." 140

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